

FINANCE STUDENTS STUDY HARD TO PASS PROFESSION-LEVEL CFA EXAM

BY MARY MCNALLY

IT'S MORE THAN JUST BOOT CAMP for finance majors – more like Navy SEAL training for future captains of industry. The Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation is the recognized gold standard in financial management. Becoming certified, requires passing three rigorous levels of testing and working in a professional capacity for at least four years. Most people who attempt the first level have been working in the industry for 10 years or more. In the Orfalea College of Business, the yearlong CFA Challenge senior project prepares 15 students to take the first-level exam each year. Each level covers more than 2,700 pages on principles and applications in finance, quantitative methodology (valuation), ethics, economics and accounting. Fewer than 1 percent of people taking the six-hour tests are in college. Of all those who attempt the first level, only 39 percent pass. Cal Poly students achieved a 60 percent pass rate in 2011. It's an indication of how well-equipped Cal Poly finance students are to perform in the real world. "All kinds of people are calling to hire students with this kind of training. It's like being on the job," said Finance Area Chair Cyrus Ramezani, who launched the program four years ago. Students have to apply to the program. Class is held for



A RETURN ON THEIR COMMITMENT

CFA Challenge students hard at work on a practice test



six hours every Friday, with a practice test every other week. Dylan Gale (**B.S., Business Administration, 2010**) landed a job as a securities analyst at Wells Fargo. After the market collapse the prior year, "it was one of the most difficult hiring environments in the last 20 years," Gale said. He attributes his success to the knowledge he gained through the CFA Challenge. The rewards, he says, are worth the sacrifice. "I'm working on one of the most exciting deals of the year," he said: the initial public offering for online coupon retailer Groupon. "Not many people straight out of school get to work on deals you'd be read-

ing about on the front page of **The Wall Street Journal**." The rewards are also tangible, Ramezani said; those who hold the CFA designation make an average of \$250,000 per year.

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Blain Soohoo (**B.S. Business Administration, 2011**) is a consultant with Factset, a company that specializes in customized software for investment professionals. He said taking the

level-one test helped him feel comfortable talking with portfolio managers and institutional investors who manage hundreds of millions of dollars.

"Cal Poly is all about practical application," Soohoo said. "The CFA Challenge helped me get farther than a lot of professionals who have been in the industry for a while. □